Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Student Assistance Program

Liaison Frequently Asked Questions and Best Practice Responses

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Provided by: PNSAS-Pennsylvania Network for Student Assistance Services

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Letter of Agreement

1. What should be in the letter of agreement and how detailed should it be?

   The letter of agreement should reflect the role and scope of both the agency and school district related to what each will do over the course of the school year.

   A copy of the letter of agreement should be shared with the SAP Team and liaison. It should include:
   Agency:
   - **number of days, hours and times per school year that the agency provides services**
   - **attendance at team meetings**
   - **diagnostic assessments (if applicable)**
   - **linkage to treatment/community services,**
   - **follow up support to students**
   - **facilitation of psycho-educational groups (if applicable),**
   - **crisis intervention**
   - **assistance with district policy in times of emergency**

   District:
   - **complies with state guidelines**
   - **necessary student information (including compiled behavior checklist, discipline records, nurse, and guidance records, etc.)**
   - **a confidential area for screening/assessment**
   - **locked cabinet for SAP records**
   - **access to telephone in a private area**
   - **a representative from the school district to participate in County Coordination and/or District Council meetings**
   - **submission of required online SAP data reporting**

   A sample letter of agreement is available at www.sap.state.pa under "additional resources".

2. What is the role of SAP liaison in crisis response?

   It is a local decision as to the services the agency should provide and what a school requests. Each agency should develop a letter of agreement with each school district it serves to outline the role of the liaison, particularly in a crisis situation. However, it is not the role of the agency staff to "act as a school staff member" during a crisis situation. At a minimum, the liaison should have a copy of and have reviewed all school crisis policies for the schools in which they service.   Additional training may be warranted, depending on the requests from the school district and the expertise of the liaison. Also, it may be beyond the scope of a liaison to provide crisis response services and schools may need to contract with agencies beyond their letter of agreement for additional services.

   Additionally, liaisons can provide post-vention services. It is recommended that in the aftermath of a crisis, liaisons assist the SAP team to ensure calm among school community.

3. Are Letters of Agreement between schools and liaison agencies required?

   Yes, they are required as per "SAP Minimum Guidelines for County Mental Health programs and Liaison Services" and "Best Practice Guidelines for Single County Authorities". These documents are available at www.sap.state.pa under "additional resources".

4. If you are given an unsafe place to meet with students can you refuse?

   This area should have been addressed in letter of agreement, review and revise as necessary. Rather than refuse immediately, identify the reason for concern about the meeting place and speak with an administrator who might be able to offer an alternative. If the Liaison is truly uncomfortable, it should be communicated to the Liaison's supervisor and the school contact. If no resolution is achieved after following the conflict resolution process, then the liaison agency can refuse to provide services.

Parent Consent

5. What do liaisons need to do regarding parent/legal guardian permission for a screening/assessment?

   First and foremost, the liaison must ensure a signed school SAP consent has been obtained from the parent/ legal guardian giving the team permission for the student to be involved in SAP services. A liaison should never meet with a student for any reason without written parent consent for screening/assessment. It is important that the school and agency both be aware of how parent permission for screenings or assessments will be obtained. Liaisons need to discuss this with the participating school and outline the procedures in the Letter of Agreement. Where agencies conduct assessments in schools, parent permission should be on agency letterhead. In some schools the team case manager is responsible for acquiring the consent and in other schools the liaison may obtain the consent.

6. Are non-custodial caregivers (who do not have legal guardianship, but care for the child) permitted to sign for a SAP screening or assessment?

   These caregivers may have "education rights" affidavits, allowing them to make educational decisions, but not medical decisions. Liaisons should not accept this as legal guardianship; thus do not perform assessments under these circumstances. Depending on the age of the student and agency regulations, students may be able to access services at the agency.

7. If a student is over age 18, do you have to get parent permission prior to screening or assessing?

   First, check the district policy on obtaining consent for students over age 18. Unless legally emancipated, most districts continue to require parent consent for students over age 18. If legally emancipated, then a copy of the document should be obtained by the school. Typically, permission is still received for field trips, absences, and extra-curricular activities, so SAP consent would follow the same practice.

Program Fidelity/Infra-Structure

8. What are creative ways to provide services to schools in light of a reduction in agency funding?

   Some counties are combining mental health and drug and alcohol SAP liaison services so that they can provide one liaison dually trained in both systems to provide services to the schools. This pooling of resources will enable them to provide more services to the schools.

9. What is my role with SAP County Coordination?

   Each SAP County Coordination Team may have different expectations for liaisons. In some counties, there is one drug and alcohol and one mental health liaison represented, in other counties, only agency supervisors are represented on County Coordination Team. The role of County Coordination Team is to assure that questions, concerns, feedback, or suggestions are delivered to appropriate channels or services rendered. SAP County Coordination Guidelines are available at: www.sap.state.pa.us .

10. How do liaisons best help teams maintain program fidelity?

    Review the process periodically at team meetings, provide handouts, such as Best Practices, and encourage getting on faculty meeting and back to school night agendas. Bring any concerns to the team's attention when they come up, don't let them sit idle. The more the team has to talk about the team and what it does, the easier it is to maintain the fidelity.

11. What do liaisons do/say if there are problems with the team functioning and process, (since they have an allegiance to teams but this may conflict with agency role)? Example: When inappropriate topics are on team agenda, team minutes, or behavior checklist.

    The liaison is a team member and can provide technical assistance on appropriate SAP process and procedures. It could be appropriate to suggest best practice to the team. Liaisons should follow the conflict resolution process and speak with their supervisor about any greater concerns that affect team functioning or their role as a liaison.

    Some suggestions are:
    Suggest teams check SAP website for new sample forms www.sap.state.pa.us (team benchmarks and indicators document and checklists, what should be included on meeting agenda, minutes, behavior checklist, consents, etc.).
    Team maintenance should be scheduled, especially if it's been several years since one has occurred.
    The liaison supervisor could conduct supervision meetings and attend team meetings. This could be an opportunity for someone that does not have a personal connection to the team to provide unbiased feedback.
    The liaison supervisor could meet with the building principal.
    Ask Regional Coordinator for technical assistance.
    A Regional Coordinator can provide suggestions and options to address team concerns at a Networking Day or SAP Coordination/District Council meetings.

12. If you are covering a large rural area and a team has few referrals, is it acceptable for them to participate via phone/Skype?

   If referrals are lacking, the Liaison could assist the team with marketing and in-service.   It is important that a liaison work with schools in dissemination of "observable behaviors appropriate for referral to SAP" to attempt to improve referral rates. It would not be appropriate to stop attending meetings, as this may further reduce the number of referrals. Also, it is necessary for each agency to complete their contract with their county and involve the county in concerns prior to considering reduction in services. If a team is not meeting or meeting very infrequently, it may be appropriate for a liaison and county to refrain from providing liaison services. This should only be done after following the conflict resolution process as outlined in the letter of agreement between the agency and school.   If your school is very small and has few students, there may be options you can discuss with your regional coordinator.

13. What happens when a SAP Team is not meeting or meets very infrequently?

   See answer to question #4. If there is still not resolution, it may be appropriate for an agency and County administrators to refrain from providing liaison services. This should only be done after following the conflict resolution process as outlined in the letter of agreement between the agency and school.

Groups

14. Should agency staff facilitating support groups sit on the SAP team if another staff person is the designated SAP liaison for that team?

   No, the role of the group facilitator is different than that of the SAP Liaison. The group facilitator should have a contact person on the team with whom he or she communicates. It is imperative that a communication mechanism be developed so appropriate "need to know" group information is relayed back to the SAP Team. This assures that roles are not blurred and that appropriate agency personnel are on the teams. This also prevents a conflict of interest with group facilitators referring students to their groups, when this is the role of non-biased team members.   Group facilitators could be invited at the end of a group cycle to report out on the conclusion of the group or share any additional concerns.

15. Can I run a group without school personnel co-facilitating?

   It is best practice to have a school co-facilitator. However, agency personnel may run groups without a co-facilitator. If there is no co-facilitator, some mechanism for assistance must be developed in case assistance is needed during a group session. Be sure this is approved by both the agency and the school and outlined in letter of agreement

Professional Development/In-Service

16. Can I provide Team maintenance to my own teams?

No, a liaison is a member of the team; they should not be conducting the team maintenance. The team may instead invite a colleague, who is non-team member and knowledgeable of group dynamics and SAP.

17. Can liaisons provide in-service to school district faculty or the PTO/PTA regarding SAP?

Yes, the liaison can assist the team with in-service and other appropriate duties as time permits.

18. What is the difference between county coordination and networking?

Each county may differ in the structure and purpose each venue provides.
County Coordination is a team comprised of representations from SAP child-serving systems that meet regularly to provide the leadership, planning and coordination necessary to implement effective SAP services at the county or county joinder level. SAP Coordination Team membership can change from county to county. County Coordination Guidelines are available at: www.sap.state.pa.us.
Networking can be associated with a training event, such as Networking Day. This generally is a professional development opportunity extended to SAP teams.
Networking or District Council meetings can be team sharing and problem solving forums. The focus would likely be different from one meeting to the next.

Screening/Assessment

19. What is the difference between screening and assessment?

See question #54 on existing SAP Best Practice Q&A.

"A screening is less invasive and less clinical in nature. They gather enough information to determine if the situation warrants further evaluation and/or the severity of the student's needs to determine the timeline of need for services."

"An assessment is done by an agency staff member from a drug and alcohol or mental health provider. Typically, this assessment occurs in an agency but in some counties may take place in the school setting. An assessment is much more detailed and clinical in nature. It delves deeper into specifics of mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues. There are credentials that the assessor needs to have to conduct a full assessment. In general, there are fewer requirements for the screener than for an assessor. Contact our county administrators for drug and alcohol or mental health as each may have different expectations for the role of the SAP liaison in a school setting."

20. How does a liaison determine whether to do a screening or an assessment?

Often it determined by the county contract whether the SAP liaison will complete the assessment. Depending on this contract, the liaison may just conduct the screening then refer the student for assessment to another agency.

21. What screening or assessment tool should we use?

It is up to each County MH and D&A office to determine their expectations with regard to screening or assessment tools. This should be decided at the agency level in conjunction with the SCA and local MH office. At this time the PNSAS does not mandate a screening tool for either mental health or drug and alcohol.

22. Are there things we should ask in a screening?

Liaison screenings should ask probing questions about a student's mental state and drug use. They should be asked questions about tobacco use, alcohol use and drug use as well as if they have felt depressed, sad, or hopeless.

23. Are there things we should <u>not</u> ask in a screening?

A screening should only ask enough questions to ascertain that there are indications of a concern with drug and alcohol, mental health issues, or other issues. Probing questions that will assist with identifying the level of care needed should be limited to assessments. This should be developed consultation with the local SCA and MHA.

24. What do I do (as a liaison) with a student who does not follow-through with my screening/assessment recommendations?

Discuss it with the SAP team. The SAP case manager could follow-up with the student and family to discuss the importance of the recommendations with him/her. The liaison could contact the parent to review recommendations, obtain update, and offer assistance if needed (this can be done more than once-depending on agency role). Additional options may be viable depending on the letter of agreement with the agency and school.

Records

25. How long should agencies maintain screening records?

It is the responsibility of the agency to decide what type of record or category a SAP screening would be classified. Once determined, the SAP screening would be disseminated and maintained following the established agency procedures for those types of records.

26. How long should agencies maintain assessment records?

SAP assessments are agency records and are maintained in accordance with established policy and procedures as all assessments conducted by the agency. Length of time maintained

would be determined by adopted policy and procedures. However, records must be maintained for 6 years   according to HIPPA or longer if any state requirement exceeds the HIPPA requirement. Assessments are subject to the same records policies regardless of whether conducted in the school or at the agency.

27. Where should records from screenings and assessments be kept?

    Screening and assessment records should be kept at the agency in a secure, locked file and should not be kept in a school.   Screening and assessment records generated at the school should be transported to the agency as soon as possible.   While in transit, all records should be kept in a file box, locked in the trunk or in a locked car.

28. Who at the agency has access to liaison screening/assessment files?

    There should be restricted access to files, along with written log of those who accessed the file.

29. What should liaisons keep as part of a SAP agency record?

    - **Signed parent/guardian consent form**
    - **Signed parent/guardian refusal form**
    - **Dates and notes from SAP meetings where referred student was discussed (i.e. referral reason, grades, etc.).**
    - **Dates/notes from all parent/guardian contacts**
    - **Screening/Assessment**
    - **Recommendations**
    - **American Society of Addiction Medicine(ASAM)/Pennsylvania Client Placement Criteria(PCPC)**
    - **Confirmation/Denial of services**
    - **Monitoring/progress notes or reports**
    - **Any additional documentation required by the agency**

30. Can liaison screening records be monitored by county and/or state agencies?

    Mental health screening records are not monitored by state agencies.   DDAP screening records can be monitored by state agencies.   However, both mental health and drug and alcohol screening records are subject to monitoring by County Mental Health or Drug and Alcohol funding agents in accordance with the county service contract.

31. Can liaison assessments completed in schools be monitored by county and/or state agencies?

    Yes, assessments are under the applicable regulations of DDAP and OMHSAS, regardless of being completed in the schools.

32. What is a liaison allowed to share from a screening or assessment in writing to the school?

Liaisons completing a screening can share recommendations the liaison has for a student, as long as there is an informed, written release signed by parent/guardian.
In the case of a drug and alcohol liaison that completes assessments, a student must sign the release of information. In the case of a mental health liaison that completes assessments and the student is over 14, the student must sign the release of information. The agency should not provide the school a copy of the completed screening or assessment. However, they can provide a copy of the blank assessment tool at the beginning of the school year.

If a student who is being assessed does not sign the release of information, the liaison should not conduct the assessment in the school.

In the event a student discloses threat to self/others, the liaison should follow procedure in notifying appropriate individuals (parent, school, emergency delegate, or possibly the police).

33. What do liaisons share verbally verses written? (What should we be telling them so that they can accurately complete the PDE 4092 reporting forms?)

Liaisons should share screening/assessment recommendations in writing to the team, rather than verbally.   This should be placed in the student SAP file.   No verbal information should be shared with the team that violates confidentiality regulations.

Reporting

34. Does data from the Joint Quarterly Reporting System (JQRS) need to be completed for students from the elementary schools?

Yes, all liaison services should be included in JQRS.   JQRS reporting will cover school age children, categories are 9 or younger, 10-13, 14-17, and 18+.

Team/Process Issues

35. What is my role if my schools don't have a common meeting time? Am I allowed to or still required to provide screenings?

This should be outlined in your letter of agreement with the school district. Agency administration should meet with district administration to address the issue and how to resolve it.

The letter of agreement details school and agency expectations and responsibilities aligned to SAP best practices. Schools not implementing the PA SAP Model are not entitled to receive agency services. The model is a partnership among three state agencies and funding is provided to county mental health and drug and alcohol programs to support, consultation and assessment services.

36. If my teams do not provide behavior checklists or compilation, should I still screen/assess a student they refer?

   No. This should be outlined in the letter of agreement at the beginning of each school year. A liaison should only complete a screening or assessment on a student in which the team has followed the steps in the SAP process and documentation is complete. Documentation includes, written parent/guardian permission, behavior checklists, behavior checklist compilation, and other supporting documentation. This information helps determine if it is an appropriate referral and assists with formulation of recommendations. Sample forms and SAP Best Practice Guidelines are available at: www.sap.state.pa.us.

   For drug and alcohol policy violations, this process will depend on the school district drug and alcohol policy and your agency's letter of agreement.

Training

37. What training is a SAP liaison required to attend?

   SAP K-12 training is required for all SAP liaisons and any additional training required by the County administrators.

38. What type of on-going training is available for SAP liaisons?

   Training availability will vary from county to county. Optional trainings may include: PASAP conference (statewide and regional), County SAP Networking, and miscellaneous DDAP and OMHSAS trainings.

39. Are SAP MH/D&A liaison supervisors required to attend SAP Leadership Training?

   Annual contracts with PA Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs require counties to have all Drug and Alcohol liaison supervisors attend SAP Leadership Training.   This is offered regularly via DDAP Training Management System, at www.ddap.pa.gov.   The SAP Minimum Guidelines for County Mental Health Programs and Liaison Services issued by OMHSAS advises the following:
   Contracted providers ensure that appropriate agency personnel that supervise SAP liaisons be knowledgeable about SAP, have training in the Student Assistance Program and are capable of providing a local system-wide focus and representation supporting SAP. Complete Minimum Guidelines document is available at: www.sap.state.pa.us.

Miscellaneous

40. Are liaisons required to complete Mandated Reporter training?

   Yes, since SAP liaisons have direct contact with children in schools, they need to complete PA Children and Youth Mandated Reporting training.